

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT A 04708 272115Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 PM-05 NSCE-00 CIAE-00
INR-07 NSAE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 AID-05 IGA-02 OMB-01
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE PORT AU PRINCE 4708

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, PINT, EAID, HA
SUBJ: RIOTS IN GONAIVES

1. SUMMARY. IN THE WAKE OF ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATIONS IN GONAIVES ABOUT FOOD DISTRIBUTION ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1977, THE PREFECT'S HOUSE WAS SACKED AND SOME FOOD, A FAN AND A CALCULATOR WERE STOLEN FROM A CARE WAREHOUSE. THE MOB WAS DISPERSED BY THE POLICE AND ABOUT 40 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, ABOUT 9 A.M. ABOUT 50 PLACARD WAVING DEMONSTRATORS APPEARED AT ONE OF THE CARE WAREHOUSES IN THE PROVINCIAL SEAPORT TOWN OF GONAIVES. THE PLACARDS HAD SLOGANS SUCH AS "DOWN WITH MISERY," "LIBERTE," AND "FOOD FOR THE PEOPLE." WHILE THE WAREHOUSE FOREMAN WENT FOR POLICE HELP, THE DEMONSTRATORS BROKE IN THROUGH A SIDE DOOR AND STOLE A NUMBER OF CASES OF VEGETABLE OIL, A NUMBER OF SACKS OF BULGAR WHEAT, A FAN, AND A CALCULATOR. THE MOB HAD GROWN TO ABOUT 300 PEOPLE BY THE TIME THE POLICE ARRIVED. IT DISPERSED WHEN THE POLICE FIRED PISTOLS INTO THE AIR. DEMONSTRATIONS AT OTHER WAREHOUSES APPARENTLY WERE BROKEN UP WITHOUT LOSS.

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3. A SIMILAR DEMONSTRATION TOOK PLACE IN FRONT OF THE PREFECT'S HOUSE. THE PREFECT IS THE TOP CIVIL ADMINISTRATOR IN THE CITY. APPARENTLY, THE HOUSE WAS THOROUGHLY RANSACKED BEFORE THE DEMONSTRATORS WERE DISPERSED.

4. LOCAL RADIO STATIONS BEGAN BROADCASTING GARBLED VERSIONS OF THE INCIDENTS IN LATE MORNING AND CONTINUED UNTIL A NEWS

BLACKOUT WAS IMPOSED IN LATE AFTERNOON. INTERIOR MINISTER AURELIEN JEANTY WAS SUMMONED TO THE PALACE ABOUT NOON AND WAS SENT BY HELICOPTER TO GONAIVES TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION. BY THE TIME HE ARRIVED THE POLICE HAD MATTERS IN HAND, HAD ARRESTED ABOUT 40 PEOPLE, AND WERE SEEKING ADDITIONAL SUSPECTS.

5. COMMENT. THE DEMONSTRATIONS APPEAR TO HAVE EVOLVED FROM CONFUSION ABOUT RECENT ARRIVALS OF PL 480 TITLE II FOOD FOR CARE AND LARGE QUANTITIES OF LATE ARRIVING FRENCH FLOUR FOR DROUGHT RELIEF. SOME OF THE PEOPLE APPARENTLY THOUGHT THAT THE FOOD WAS TO BE GIVEN AWAY AND WANTED "THEIR SHARE." OTHERS MAY HAVE BEEN UNHAPPY ABOUT ALLEGED CORRUPTION BY THE PREFECT.

6. THE GOVERNMENT PROBABLY WILL REGARD THE DEMONSTRATIONS AS A SERIOUS THREAT, FEARING THAT THEY WILL BE REPEATED IN OTHER CITIES.
JONES

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